

Find out why rheumatoid arthritis is easily misdiagnosed

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes inflammation, swelling, and severe pain in and around the joints.

In RA, the body's immune system mistakenly attacks and inflames the joints, sometimes damaging cartilage or even bones.¹ Over time, there is loss of cartilage and the joints can become loose, unstable, and painful. Joint deformity and a loss of mobility can also occur.

Rheumatoid arthritis mostly affects the joints of the hands, feet, wrists, elbows, knees, and ankles. The joint effect is usually symmetrical, so that if one knee or hand is affected, usually the other one is, too. Because joint damage cannot be reversed, and because it can occur early, doctors recommend early diagnosis and aggressive treatment to control it.

Rheumatoid arthritis affects nearly 1% of the world's population, with nearly three times as many women afflicted as men. In women, RA most commonly begins between ages 30 and 60. In men, it often occurs later in life. Family history and lifestyle choices can also increase the odds of having RA.

"It is of utmost importance to be sure about an arthritis diagnosis because treatment is now targeted to the specific disease," **said Simon Helfgott, MD, a Boston physician and Best Doctors medical expert.** "For example, we have an entire array of biological therapies and other drugs to treat rheumatoid arthritis. In fact, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, and others can be effectively treated to achieve disease remission. That is the goal for nearly all patients."

RA symptoms include:

- Pain or aching in more than one joint, particularly in the hands
- Joint stiffness, tenderness, and swelling, especially in the morning
- Similar symptoms on both sides of the body (such as in both hands or both knees)
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Fatigue

RA can be effectively treated and managed with medication(s) and self-management strategies. Treatment for RA usually includes the use of medications that slow the disease and prevent joint deformity.

Diagnosis of RA can often be difficult because the symptoms of several diseases resemble those of rheumatoid arthritis. Among these are gout, lupus, fibromyalgia, scleroderma, and many forms of arthritis other than RA.

Knowing if you have the correct diagnosis and treatment or not can make all the difference when deciding your next steps. If you have been diagnosed with RA, or simply are beginning to notice some of its symptoms, Best Doctors can give you peace of mind with an expert second opinion and either confirm or modify your diagnosis.

¹<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/rheumatoid-arthritis/what-is-rheumatoid-arthritis.php>

For more information, call 1-877-419-2378, or visit bestdoctors.com/canada/start.